

97-84008-3

Guild, John M.

“Commercial organizations  
and civic affairs”

[Washington, D.C.]

[1914]

97.84 008.3  
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Box 29 Guild, John M 1875-  
"Commercial organizations and civic affairs." By  
John M. Guild, executive secretary, the Greater Dayton  
association, Dayton, Ohio; director of the American asso-  
ciation of commercial executives, and ex-president, Cen-  
tral association of commercial secretaries, before a joint  
meeting of these two organizations, held in Cincinnati,  
Ohio, September 28, 29 and 30, 1914. [Washington, D. C.,  
American civic association, 1914]  
10 p. 23"  
Caption title.  
1. Boards of trade—U. S. 2. Commercial associations—U. S. 3. Mu-  
nicipal government—U. S. 1. American civic association. II. Title.  
Library of Congress JS345.1914.G8 15-18950  
ONLY ED.

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm

REDUCTION RATIO: 11:1

IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 1/12/97

INITIALS: AR

TRACKING #: MSH 20540

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**"COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIC AFFAIRS."**

By JOHN M. GUILD,

Executive Secretary, The Greater Dayton Association, Dayton, Ohio; Director of The American Association of Commercial Executives, and Ex-President, Central Association of Commercial Secretaries, before a joint meeting of these two organizations, held in Cincinnati, Ohio, September 28, 29 and 30, 1914.

The business men of the country are turning an important page in the administration of their local affairs according to the returns from seventy cities ranging from Seattle to Yonkers. All are representative and large enough to have civic affairs of magnitude, with the usual complications.

Regardless of commercial success or form of government we find a most interesting situation. The tendency is away from the idea that local questions are politics, and from the idea that it is a dangerous field. In cities where a commission form has been adopted, the business men, working through their different organizations, were responsible. This more than anything else is indicative of the determination to have city affairs run along business lines. Until recently, city affairs had been neglected by the business man. He hadn't bothered much about such things. Taxation brought him to his senses, to find anything but business management in the city corporation in which he is a big stockholder. While he has turned over a new leaf, we also find on the part of city officials, a ready willingness, and in many instances an actual desire for help on city problems.

Except Savannah and Newark, Ohio, every city heard from takes an interest and part in civic affairs. These two declare their organizations strictly commercial, whereas New Haven points to civic affairs as one of their main functions. Where interest is taken it is invariably a steady interest. Only six are spasmodic.

Specific periods of activity range from one year in the case of Oakland to 40 years in the case of Pittsburgh; 25 report 5 years or less; 7 around 10; 7, 15; and 7, 20 or more. A number unfortunately made their replies read "since organization." These invariably are larger cities, like Albany, Denver, Erie, Indianapolis, Jersey City, Kansas City, Grand Rapids and Buffalo. The point here involved is that practically half the cities heard from have been busy in this field less than five years.

The general interpretation that civic affairs are public affairs, not politics, means emancipation from the old idea that commercial bodies should keep out of anything that smacked of politics. While all taboo politics as such, two organizations—Minneapolis and Peoria, prohibit having anything to do with politics as well as other subjects not commercial, by specific provision in constitution or by-laws. Newark goes further and restricts itself from taking part even in matters of legislation.

One member when returning his blank accompanied it with a letter that is a classic on the subject of politics. He regards it as essential that a sharp dividing line be drawn between civic affairs and political activities. He says "no commercial organization can afford to enter upon preselection campaigns, or as a body concern itself in the political preferment of any candidate. Such activities will surely form the rock upon which the commercial ship will founder. The political activities of the community must be left to the individual and to the organizations regularly constituted to promote issues, policies and the candidacies of men." If, as the writer goes on to say—"commercial organizations must stand for progressive government" how is that to be attained if the commercial bodies do not take hold but continue to leave these things to political organizations exclusively? He contends that "commercial organization effort in this direction must consist of focusing public attention to desirable ends and crystallizing public sentiment toward their realization, that its labors as a body must be pursued during noncampaign periods and must deal wholly with existing administrative factors." There are many refutations in the data received to his statement that "the lines which divide commercial organizations and city governments, as well as the points of contact which create a new and beneficent force in community life are coming into stronger relief." The movement seems to be in the other direction. Points of contact are multiplying, especially where the organization is the recognized factor for the direction of civic as well as commercial affairs.

In the handling of civic affairs half of the organizations use special committees for specific work, while the other half have a civic or municipal affairs committee. Detroit and San Francisco report special "departments" of their organizations. The size of the committees is surprising. Only 16 out of the total number have committees of less than 10 members; 10 run from 10 to 20; 5 are in the 20's; 1, Indianapolis, has 40, and Grand Rapids reports 97.

Another factor in the analysis of committees is their leadership. Lawyers are in the lead, with 12 chairmen; 11 organizations report a "business man" as head, without being specific; then come 8 reporting manufacturers; 4, jobbers; 3, physicians; 2, real estate men; 2, engineers; 2, bankers. The balance is made up of railroad men, architects, city comptroller, florist, etc. New Haven reports the Mayor and Grand Rapids a minister in charge.

Frequency of meetings is a local proposition. Twenty-two answer "on call," 7 specify weekly, 6 monthly, 7 semimonthly and 4 report 4 or 5 meetings a year.

An important point is whether or not the civic effort of commercial bodies has recognition from the city administrations. Thirty-five declare a friendly attitude and the balance vary from "sometimes" to "otherwise"—the "otherwise" being from Grand Rapids. Cambridge says "recognized officially on a friendly basis, but the chairman (lawyer) is considered a 'high-brow' by the powers that be in the city government and hence doesn't get a very hearty response from them."

In all cases, the powers of committees are recommendatory to a higher body,

presumably the board of directors, no committee or department having authority to proceed on its own conclusions.

To the question "has it respect and support of the public?" practically all answers were in the affirmative.

What suggested or brought about the appointment of a civic affairs committee, and thereby started the civic ball rolling is really the key to the situation and shows such a wide range that several verbatim replies are given. Several replied "civic affairs considered part of Chamber of Commerce work." "Need for more interest on part of business men in municipal affairs," comes from Reading. Milwaukee says—"the fact that the material progress of the city depends in a measure upon good government."

According to Fall River, one of the "objects is to assist in securing efficient and economic administration of public affairs, to cultivate and foster civic spirit and mould public opinion."

Wilkes-Barre—"recognition of fact that business men must take an active interest in civic government."

East St. Louis—"the necessity of bringing about civic improvement, owing to laxity and indifference of administrative officials."

Kansas City (Kans.)—"a recognized need of public opinion expressed through a forum."

Spokane—"constantly increased burden of taxation."

Aren't these interesting? Everyone different, but after all, meaning the same.

Those who have not entered this field may be curious to know how city officials took the appointment of these committees. Of the few replies to this question, two-thirds answered "in a friendly way" with a few "indifferently" and some "unfavorably." In one instance (South Bend) their "motive was questioned," while Boston said—"good politicians favored it, bad ones did not." In East St. Louis it was looked upon as "meddling as usual," and Fall River answers "with prophecies of failure and mutterings about minding one's own business." That was a good sign and evidence of anticipated influence. Jersey City used the word "hostile," and in Wilkes-Barre the movement was "regarded at first with derision, now with respect."

The press recognizes these committees in all cases, but without giving up their partisan proclivities. Several report hearty support, while one city says—"one paper friendly, the other contemptuous, owing largely to politics." This just goes to show what commercial bodies are up against when they meet the power of the press. In about a half and half proportion, newspapers give support to the committee one time and are against it the next, according to the issue, so that press support is also a strictly local question.

After reaching a conclusion in any matter, how is that conclusion brought to the attention of the administration? Approximately one-half report this done through delegations or in conferences. The other half vary, quite a number answering "by letter." The medium seems to make little difference, as practically all report favorable acceptance.

The reply "nothing doing" is almost unanimous on how active commercial bodies are in city elections. Omaha is an exception to the extent that they urge their members to register and vote and to examine into qualifications of candidates before voting. This they do by circular letter and through the press. Other exceptions are Cincinnati, which took part in 1913 election for charter commissioners, and Cleveland, where they take part in all elections except as to individuals, and have won all important campaigns except one. The people there have voted with their side in all instances except three. Kansas City (Mo.) has always been very guarded in reference to taking any interest in city elections, but adds "we may have to change our views." That is significant!

In this connection, what I could tell of Dayton, my home town, would consume the balance of the day. I therefore hesitate to say anything. But it was the business men who undertook the overthrow of the old political form of government there, and successfully carried three elections to do it. First—in the change of form of government to the commission-manager plan and the election of 15 business men as a charter commission. Second—adoption of a new charter. Third—election of 5 business men as commissioners.

That was no easy task, but the business man was in earnest, and even with a very disastrous flood intervening, the work was carried through to success. Today we think Dayton the best business-managed city in the country.

The Greater Dayton Association makes a special feature of a monthly forum in its rooms, to which all members and citizens are invited, to hear city officials present facts and figures on any act of the commission or the manager, or on any proposed undertaking. After a presentation of the subject the speakers are turned over to the audience for questioning and cross-questioning to their heart's content. In this way ignorant criticism is avoided, and those who attend are correctly informed on what is going on in the City Hall.

In recommending city appointments, practically all say "no," but some recommended men for minor positions and in several cases insisted on certain appointees. Oakland recommended "the appointment of a harbor-master and secured a good man to hustle business for municipal wharves." There is one case of business and politics mixing.

A most gratifying feature and one that eliminates more than anything else, any line of cleavage between the city hall and the association headquarters is the number of city officials on municipal committees. Duluth goes so far as to appoint all of its city commissioners honorary members of their civic affairs committee—a good idea in one way, but it is generally better to have them active rather than honorary.

According to returns, city officials actually work with the committees, in the persons of 5 mayors, 5 city commissioners, 3 councilmen, 3 comptrollers, 3 city attorneys, 2 chiefs of police, 2 city engineers, 2 health officers, a director of public safety, fire chief, superintendent of water and superintendent of playgrounds. Therefore, the secretary whose organization is not using city officials has a message to take back with him. The man in the city hall is willing to work

with the business man if given a chance. Out of 57 answers, 55 report the two classes brought together through joint meetings. Only two, San Francisco and Jacksonville, say "no meetings" although both have taken active interest for many years, and are organized to handle such work. Meetings differ materially in their nature and purpose. They range from conferences on special subjects to social and semi-social affairs, 37 out of 52 reporting luncheons and dinners with city officials. Denver says "usually all of our activities along civic lines are preceded by joint meetings."

The reports of benefits resulting from this intercourse between merchant, manufacturer and city heads make good reading. This is important. One reports a cooperative spirit developed. Another that "acquaintanceship, education in public affairs, solidarity of action follow." "Helping to mould public sentiment" is another expression. They tend to "form and oftentimes stir public sentiment" avers one and that "business men become better acquainted with plans of importance to the city" is but natural.

To complete the chain of information, inquiry was made as to the form of government. Twenty-four report the federal plan with from 8 to 70 members in the council—5 have upper and lower houses; 20 the commission form, and 1 the commission-manager form.

Coupled with this is a showing of whether or not the commercial body is supporting the existing government. The returns show the commission form new in 14 cases, and of the other 39, 17 report changes in contemplation. Only one city (Denver) where they have commission form is support withheld because of disappointment in the way it is working out. The commission form is evidently the channel through which the business man is steering his craft in search of better results, as replies are unanimous that where in existence it was brought about through the efforts of business organizations. With but one exception the commissioners are credited with working for the best interests of the city.

Here is a brief analysis showing how much each organization had or is having to do with recent or proposed changes. Eight-supported commission form of government; 4 supported but were defeated; 3 actively supported a new charter; 3 are studying commission form of government; 2 are working for new charters; 1 opposed the proposal to elect councilmen by districts; 1 worked for and brought about the commission government for the county, and only 2 report maintaining a neutral position on charter elections.

Are commercial organizations getting into politics? Evidently, if demanding and establishing good government is politics.

How far from taking merely a passive interest in civic affairs is indicated by 36 affirmative answers out of 52 to the question—"does the committee know what is going on at all times in the city hall?" Only 7 say things are shaped up and about to go through before the committee learns of them, and 25 have representatives at council or commission meetings, developing the personal contact, while 23 do not.

How recommendations to city officials are received is answered by the word "welcome" in 47 cases and only in extreme cases do some say they are

resented. Sacramento says "resented at first, now welcome" while Peoria brings out the good point—"welcome, **if done quietly**," emphasizing the fact that in Peoria as elsewhere, city officials are human and don't like to have the appearance of any business organization seemingly running the city.

A big surprise lies in the replies to the question—"do the city officials ask for views or cooperation on anything?" Maybe that question was too broad because 48 replies are affirmative, showing a comparatively new disposition on the part of public men. Only 6 say "no," and when new matters are under consideration, only 9 are reported, leaving them for the committee to get next to. Kansas City, Kans., says—"seldom undertake anything without learning public sentiment."

The city's annual budget is evidently the focal point of the business man's interest, 42 cities reporting hearings on it. In these, 32 organizations have taken part in an effort to have changes made, while only 8 express indifference on this important matter. The replies are interesting because they show how successful the business man can be, when he gets into the game. Peoria—"succeeded in securing a larger appropriation for civic purposes." Spokane—"in 1914 reduced levy from 13 to 12 mills," "while Syracuse, Louisville, Patterson, Los Angeles, Denver, Kansas City, New Orleans, Buffalo, Washington, Sacramento, South Bend, Indianapolis, Hartford, Cleveland, Fall River and Seattle all give answers that mean usually successful.

Is not that a gratifying and encouraging report, a splendid showing in view of the fact that only 10 out of all those heard from have a bureau of municipal research to guide them? These 10 maintain such a bureau either as part of the organization or independently of it. Most of them, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton, Hoboken, Milwaukee, Springfield, Mass., and St. Louis are independent. The two that maintain bureaus as part of the organizations are Cleveland and Minneapolis. Six are reported as of recent origin—within the last six years, and Minneapolis and Springfield within the last year. Cleveland is exceptional in having maintained such a bureau for 22 years. The annual cost of these bureaus ranges from \$2,000 to \$25,000. The cost of Cleveland's is not given. That of Minneapolis is placed at \$10,000. The others, all independent, run Springfield, \$10,000, Dayton, \$12,000, Cincinnati, \$15,000, and Boston, Chicago and St. Louis, \$25,000 each. This money comes mostly from private subscription, 5—Chicago, Dayton, Cincinnati, Hoboken and Springfield being financed in that way. The expenses of three, Boston, Milwaukee and St. Louis are taken out of city funds, while two, Cleveland and Minneapolis are supported by commercial organizations. Six—Cincinnati, Dayton, Hoboken, Minneapolis, Springfield and St. Louis report the heads of their bureaus imported men, all from the parent Bureau of Municipal Research in New York City. The two locally directed institutions are Chicago and Cleveland.

Corrupt or inefficient city government is the reason given for organizing these bureaus of municipal research.

A brief statement of activities which are characteristic of the work of such bureaus does not mean that every bureau has undertaken or is limited to these

specific things. The field of activity is naturally dictated by the problems of the municipality in which such organizations work. The list merely covers what might be termed usual activities.

1. Practically every bureau has devoted considerable effort to the betterment of health conditions, because, within most municipalities, this field has been grossly neglected, and it is here that the most apparent results can be produced, generally a complete reorganization of health offices.

2. In no instances which have come to my attention have bureaus neglected the opportunity to cooperate with the city officials in the preparation of a scientific city budget, resulting in a decided improvement in budget methods.

3. Frequently such organizations have undertaken the introduction of scientific methods in city buying, with results so satisfactory and with so little cost, it is a source of wonderment that purchasing divisions have not been organized in all towns long ago.

4. In every instance some efforts have been directed toward the installation of a more adequate system of accounting, in which the average city government is the most backward and reform the most necessary.

5. Not infrequently the control of city payrolls as well as the haphazard methods of creating salaries and grades has received attention, until salary standardization has been completed in some half dozen cities and is under way in as many more.

6. The close relationship of education to other problems of the city has necessitated some attention and as educational authorities are usually most amenable to progressive measures, considerable effort has been devoted to the problems of over age, nonpromotion, etc.

7. Studies have been made of new sources of revenue, particularly with the view of stimulating the collection of delinquent funds, and indicating new places from which income may be secured.

These are given as typical examples, but should not be accepted as a program for efficiency work. The review of the year's work of a bureau of any consequence would indicate many more directions in which their activities have been found of value to the municipality.

What has all of this led to? What are the results from such efforts on the part of commercial bodies? There is enough at hand to fill a volume, but little space can be given to it as the modus operandi has been dealt with so fully as to preclude a dissertation on accomplishments. Sufficient to say these efforts have been effectively directed. They have paid large returns to every community where business men have had their civic consciences awakened and have done something definite to improve conditions. Unfortunately it is not possible to give in this paper the whole list of things done. A few will have to suffice. These have been subdivided into a few heads just for convenience:

1. Bringing experts to survey cities, city planning exhibits and adoption of a city plan.

2. Transportation:
  - Solution of traction problems.
  - Rerouting street car lines.
  - Developing railroad trackage.
  - Securing adequate terminal facilities.
  - Improvement of street car service and reduction of fares.
  - Deepening and improving river channels.
  - Securing canals.
  - Harbor improvements.
  - Development of port facilities.
  - Municipal wharves.
  - Terminals for river and barge canal traffic.
  - Bridge projects innumerable.
3. Streets:
  - Opening new streets.
  - Widening old streets.
  - Paving and more rigid specifications.
  - Vacation of streets.
  - Building of switches across streets for industries.
  - Street lighting proper and miles of decorative lighting.
  - Street signs and revision of street names.
  - Improved sidewalks.
  - Removal of poles.
4. Health:
  - Housing survey and improvement.
  - Clean-up campaigns.
  - Sanitation in laboring sections.
  - Preventing pollution of rivers.
  - Improved water supply.
  - Filtration plant.
  - Pure milk campaigns.
  - Fly campaigns.
  - Sewage and garbage disposal.
  - New hospitals.
  - Price of ice.
  - Smoke abatement.
  - Public comfort stations.
  - Revision of building code.
5. Recreational:
  - Comprehensive recreational survey.
  - Playgrounds, parks and boulevards.
  - Improvement of river fronts.
  - Moving picture board.
  - Band concerts.
  - Social centers.

6. Financial:
  - Budget reform.
  - Reduction in taxes.
  - Better tax measures.
  - Bond issues galore.
7. Public Safety:
  - "Safety first" along all lines.
  - Fought establishment of grade crossings.
  - Eliminated grade crossings by track elevation.
  - Removal of overhead wires.
  - Traffic regulations.
8. Educational:
  - Abolishment of antiquated school systems.
  - Building of new schools.
  - School garden contests.
  - Teachers' pension law.
9. Miscellaneous:
  - Good roads.
  - Tree planting.
  - Annexation of territory.
  - Establishing work farm for petty offenders.
  - Municipal auditorium.
  - Improvement in postal facilities and service.
  - Improvement in telephone service.
  - Suppression of charity fakirs.
  - Expulsion of fraudulent and itinerant merchants.
  - Fire prevention and protection.
  - Improvement of fire department and alarm systems.
  - Reduction in fire insurance rates.
  - Heading off undesirable city ordinances.
  - Even the courts are not exempt.

This healthy list of over 70 items is proof of the business man's influence when aroused and intelligently directed. It shows what he can do if he tries. The list looks almost like a summary of Dayton civic activities, only that there are others that have not been mentioned, such as street cleaning, establishing of a legal aid bureau and a remedial loan association, a comprehensive social survey through funds raised by the women members of The Greater Dayton Association, campaign against billboards, an arrangement between the city and the hospitals for the handling of city patients and a federation of all the charities as a department of The Greater Dayton Association.

When Isaac F. Marcosson, one of the nation's leading magazine writers wrote up Dayton for Collier's a few months ago, here is the relation between The Greater Dayton Association and the city government that he established from his own observation.

"Thorough in all things, Dayton has left nothing to chance. Even before the cheers announcing the adoption of the new charter had died down the progressive men of the town were saying: 'The success of this commission government lies in having a strong and constant public opinion behind it.' In other words, it needed a perpetual prop, and that prop came in the organization of The Greater Dayton Association. Here then is the force to stoke the fires of civic patriotism."

Since then Elbert Hubbard has looked us over and here is what he says:

"The Greater Dayton Association created a public sentiment which makes the work of the city manager effective and efficient. It works with and for Dayton's new plan of government, and is in fact an integral part of the government. Why government should be something apart from the people I have never been able to fathom. Dayton is nearer democracy than any other city in the world, and the end is not yet."

In Dayton, what is considered by many to be an experiment is being conducted both in municipal and in civic affairs, as The Greater Dayton Association construes them. Whether it be an experiment or not, it is the work of the business men, who in order to insure successful city government above all else, dissolved the old Chamber of Commerce that compared to the average commercial body and organized an association which now has nearly 8,000 members—men and women of all classes, who as Mr. Hubbard says "stand a solid phalanx against the powers of laziness, ignorance, weakness and the gravitation with the downward pull."

Let me quote one more observer—Mr. Harry A. Wheeler of Chicago, until recently president of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. He has been to Dayton, too. He says—"that a civic commercial body to be successful must have numerical strength, ample finances and personal service, and that if it also has **democracy in its membership** it has the keynote essential to success." We have thus established the fourth side of the square.

And this all comes from our plunge into what was lately known in Dayton as politics, and the wiping out of any line between the business man and the city official. There we are all working together toward the goal of an ideal government.



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